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# ASPHODEL

BY

MARY J. SERRANO



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# Asphodel

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## CANTO FIRST

Oh, pause, relentless Time! nor strike the hour,  
The fatal hour that shall engulf the fair  
And sweet delights of years, with baleful power  
To cast them forth again, dark shapes of care;  
Shadows that oft shall people the still air  
And haunt the childless mother's lonely ways;  
For Joy's bright flowers bitter seeds oft bear,  
And on the heart in absence heavier weighs  
Than present pain the memory of once happy days.

## Asphodel

But no! life's saddest word is said, "Farewell!"  
The bleeding fibres of Dolores' heart  
With anguish quiver as she hears the knell  
Of peace and sweet content; and salt tears start  
And hide from her dim eyes, as they depart,  
Ormond and Violet; then o'er the smiling face  
Of Earth a veil seems drawn; no warmth impart  
To her chill breast the sun's bright beams that grace  
With fadeless splendor Nature's fairest dwelling-place.

And all glad sights and pleasant sounds that reach  
Her deadened senses seem to mock her woe—  
The slender palm that crowns the long, low beach;  
The gleaming waters' gentle ebb and flow;  
The bright-hued birds like living gems that glow  
'Mid the primeval forests' gloom, and make  
Vocal its solitudes, as to and fro  
They flit; the bloom that skirts the tangled brake;—  
All, all another pang in her torn bosom wake.

For she who had shared with her this paradise,  
Whose joy and grief its sunshine and its shade,  
Since on its beauty first her infant eyes  
Had opened, for Dolores' heart had made—  
She of whom some fond memory each glade  
And blooming dell, each hill and stream endears,  
With her shall wander there where late they strayed  
No more till thrice the slow-revolving spheres  
Shall weave the mystic chain that binds the rounded years.

And Earth, indifferent to her child's despair,  
Serenely bright, in cruel beauty smiles;  
Content to shine with charms divinely fair,  
Though none of all those glowing charms beguiles  
Dolores' heart of grief, or reconciles  
Her soul with joy; for joy, alas! is dead.  
And in her loneliness those summer isles  
A wild and dreary waste lie round her spread;  
For Nature woos in vain the heart whence peace has fled.

Meanwhile the little boat that bore away  
Ormond and Violet had reached the proud  
And stately vessel anchored in the bay,  
Like some great white-winged bird that seemed, endowed  
With conscious grace, against the hills, black-browed  
And silent, as it stood defined; but sealed  
To beauty were their senses, for with bowed  
And troubled hearts their being did they yield  
To sorrow, whose black veil all joyous things concealed.

But soon the freshening breeze that filled the sails,  
As slowly faded from their gaze the land,  
Though far it bore her from her native vales,  
Where late she saw in voiceless anguish stand  
The friend and guardian whose untiring hand  
Had smoothed life's pathway for her tender feet,  
Revived Violet's languid pulse with bland  
Caressing murmurs that her senses greet  
Like voices from the far-off Future, strange and sweet.

For Grief's dark shape, although she enters oft  
The enchanted halls of Youth and lingers there,  
A guest unbidden, paralyzing soft  
And gentle natures with Medusa stare,  
The magic, wondrous radiance yet doth share  
Shining within those portals, mild and bright,  
Until her sombre features take a fair  
And friendly seeming in the charmèd sight,  
As some gray ruin smiles in Dawn's transfiguring light.

Swift on the waves the shades of night descend,  
And on the purple splendor of the hills,  
Whose outlines with the dusky ambient blend,  
Then disappear. No northern twilight fills  
The solemn pause 'twixt night and day and stills  
To pensive rest the bosom passion-tost;  
And with swift pain Violet's being thrills,  
As, in the darkness and the distance lost,  
Fades from her eager gaze the last faint line of coast.

Morning on tropic seas! Ardent the Sun  
Sprints from his couch beneath the eastern wave,  
Shakes his bright locks, ascends his car anon;  
His steeds impatient spurn the sands that pave  
With amber light the ocean-roofed cave;  
Their nostrils breathe forth flames; their manes on high  
Are tossed; the waves their glittering hoofs that lave,  
They dash in foam through the awakening sky,  
Then through the Gates of Dawn, wide open, swift they fly.

And Violet the spell unconscious owns  
With glad expectance Nature's balmy rest  
That breaks; the hymn of joy the deep intones  
An echo finds within her pensive breast;  
And all her soul contains of purest, best,  
The vital influence of the hour feels;  
Albeit the while her kindling looks attest  
The gracious power her young heart's wound that heals,  
The tear unbidden starts and down her bright cheek steals.



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For lo! before her fancy, pale and sad  
The image rises of her earliest friend,  
Whose eyes reproachful ask, "Canst thou be glad  
While to my grief new joys no ease can lend?  
Thy voice with Nature's symphony doth blend  
While mine is mute? The flame of love that burned,  
My hope and joy, in darkness hath an end,  
Within my breast its ashes cold inurned;—  
Alas! thine eyes look on while mine are backward turned."

And then her gentle spirit feels the sting  
Of love's sweet service slighted, or undone.  
Oh, could she now restore the past, and bring  
Remorse, new-born, to rule the moments gone!  
Too late! to late! the winds bear swiftly on  
Her fate appointed to stern northern shores;  
The balmy morn with the joy-giving sun  
Shall still return, but all her soul adores  
No dewy morning's light to her sad sight restores.

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Yet on those shores no exile cold awaits  
The cherished daughter of a land more fair;  
The filial piety that consecrates  
Her pilgrimage, shall find its guerdon there  
Among her father's kindred, to whose care  
Dolores yields her till her mind expand  
And hardy fruit of northern culture bear;—  
This fond desire the sanctifying hand  
Of Death has sealed, transforming it to a command.

Loyal to Nature's bond had Ormond come  
Across the waves his sacred trust to bear  
Back to the haven of his northern home  
And the safe shelter of his Anna's care;  
But far, alas, from her whose heart despair  
Now fills, as on her sick and weary sight  
The rosy morning dawns, the balmy air  
Her senses greets, henceforth that no delight  
In dewy morn shall find, still noon, or starry night.

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Swiftly the vessel glides along the waves  
That bears Violet to the early home  
Of him who gave her being; in his caves  
Old Ocean slumbers; the resplendent dome  
That canopies his majesty the beams illumine,  
Serenely bright, of cloudless suns by day;  
By night its stars with the phosphoric foam  
Mingle their light, whose fires, swift-gleaming, play  
Round the auspicious keel that onward cleaves its way.

And all Violet's heart unbid went forth  
In childlike love to Ormond, while the hours  
He would beguile with stories of the North,  
That like a bride the blossoming year with flowers  
Adorns that, frail as fair, die while the showers  
And suns of Autumn back to life in vain  
Woo them, when Nature, from her fragrant bowers  
Exiled, sees all the glory, with the wane  
Of the departing year, depart, of her brief reign.

Her loyal servitors, the while, prepare  
A regal banquet free to all who yield  
Allegiance to her, and with garlands fair  
Her courts adorn; fruits that, in store, concealed,  
Ripened 'mid sheltering greenery, revealed  
To view, delight the sense on every side.  
And hill and valley, forest, bending field  
And grove, in gold and crimson splendors dyed,  
Glow with a brighter bloom than in her young reign's pride.

But brief, alas, as bright. As fulgent clouds,  
Rosy and purple, from the setting sun  
Their hues that borrow, in the gloom that shrouds  
The horizon fade when his last rays are gone,  
So all the pomp of Nature, her green throne  
Abandoned, vanishes in swift decay—  
Swiftest when fairest; and the saddest tone  
That swells her requiem, of the joyous lay  
Is but the echo that rang in her natal day.

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Her sceptre yielding to the icy clasp  
Of hoary Winter, rude and stern of mien,  
Her blooming crown, that withers in his grasp,  
And her fair vestments of embroidered green,  
Descending from her throne, discrowned, a queen,  
She wraps her ermine mantle, soft and white,  
Around her, that no vestige may be seen  
Beneath its glittering splendor of the blight  
That lies upon her beauty, spoiled of every dear delight.

Then Ormond paints, when life again returns  
To Nature's breast, her tender vernal bloom.  
Within her veins ethereal fire burns  
Again, and rising from her frozen tomb,  
Swift she dispels with magic smile the gloom  
That round her loyal realm erewhile had hung;  
Her gracious Sire's rekindling beams consume  
The icy damps that round her brow had clung,  
And she, a goddess, blooms with charms forever young.

## Asphodel

Thus does she now in glowing beauty stand,  
Fair as a dream of youthful revery born,  
To greet them smiling on the distant strand  
To which their eager thoughts too constant turn.  
Behold! at length dawns the auspicious morn,  
Serene and bright, that to Violet's dreams  
Gives form and substance. Fancy's golden bourne,  
A line of light along the horizon gleams,  
That Fairy's magic realm to her charmed vision seems.

O Flower enchanted! whose perfumed breath  
With heaven-descended charm transports the soul,  
That Earth no sorrows and no terrors Death  
May hold, and Happiness is life's bright goal;  
The Fates themselves do bend to our control;  
Fame lends to Hope's fond speech a willing ear,  
Beckoning to heights serene, though storm-clouds roll  
Between; her secrets to our vision clear  
The Universe shall yield, even to heaven's highest sphere—

Bright Flower of Youth! alas, thou dost dissolve  
And vanish into nothingness before  
The Milky Way of Truth we may resolve  
Into the stars to which bold Thought would soar  
To people them with her creations. The vain lore  
We thirsted for with ardent soul obscures the fair,  
Alluring goal with doubt-born mists, that bore  
The prize our eager hands would grasp. Despair,  
Remorse and Death and Woe thy seeds too often bear.

\* \* \* \* \*

Near and more near that distant line of light  
Now draws, expanding to their eager gaze;  
Till from its depths emerging to their sight  
The towers of a stately city raise  
To heaven their slender height. The golden haze  
Of morning lies, a magic veil, around  
The city's base, but dome and turret blaze  
With ruddy light; while to its farthest bound  
With woods of growth primeval the low coast lies crowned.

What wild emotions thrill Violet's breast,  
As on her bodily vision breaks the scene  
That oft had risen at Fancy's charmed behest  
Before her mind in hues forever green;  
Her swiftly-varying color and rapt mien  
Tell Ormond all her lips refuse to say;—  
He who the idol of her youth had been  
Had trod with childhood's feet that hallowed clay;  
There first his eyes beheld the light of earth's brief day.

Then swift her thoughts with sudden impulse flow  
Back to the solitary home where waits  
A mourner desolate, whose cup of woe  
From the same source is filled whence emanates  
The draught intoxicating that creates  
For her a magic world; and vague remorse  
A keener strength the grief that agitates  
Her bosom lends, until with gathering force  
It sweeps the barriers down that stay its headlong course.

\* \* \* \* \*



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The tranquil beauty of a soft May eve  
Had crowned the fulness of the day's content;  
And mystic shadows had begun to weave  
A mantle of repose for Nature, sprent  
With stars pale glimmering in the firmament,  
When Violet within the ancestral walls  
Stood of her fathers, joy, with sorrow blent,  
Stirring her pulses—'midst memorials  
Time-honored of her race a stranger in their halls.

But on her troubled soul when softly fell  
Caressing accents, fondly to her breast  
When Anna clasped her, to the gracious spell  
Her sad and weary heart that longed for rest  
She yielded up. Inconstant Fancy dressed  
The future in bright hues. The cloud was gone  
Whose gloom Youth's natural buoyance had oppressed,  
By the soft glow of Love's unrisen sun  
Dispelled; and Memory resigned to Hope her throne.

## Asphodel

The cloud was gone; alas, to be replaced  
By ardors that should scorch her young life's bloom,  
Its beauty turning to a barren waste—  
Bright harbingers of darkness and the tomb.  
Even now within the secret halls of Doom  
The thunderbolt is forged whose might shall rend  
Her being to its foundations, and consume  
Hope's every promise; but no signs portend  
The gathering storm whose wings black o'er her life impend.

"And thou, my Julian," Ormond said to one  
Who stood within the curtain's crimson shade,  
"Our Violet, child of a more ardent sun,  
To shield from chilling northern airs shalt aid,  
That no young bud or tender leaf may fade  
Of Youth's fresh garland, till her heart forget  
The pain of exile by its hopes repaid."—  
Then drew him smiling to the spot where yet  
In Anna's fond embrace close held stood Violet.

And Violet, turning, places in the hand  
Her hand, that, with the threads of destiny,  
Her life shall with another's bind—a band  
Whose strength the conquering power shall defy  
Of fate and death; for as her glance the eye  
Of Julian meets, in her awakening heart  
A flame is kindled that shall never die,  
Though fate and death their mortal lives dispart,  
But of her deathless being form a deathless part.

And Julian, as from Violet Ormond claims  
For him the affection of a sister, gives  
Kind words of greeting, while his heart proclaims  
The sacred advent of a power that rives  
To its centre being, yet death itself survives.  
The seal to Destiny's decree is set,  
Henceforward that unites their fated lives,  
For in that glance two kindred souls have met  
And mingled, made by Love victorious over Fate.

## CANTO SECOND

Perennial spring of life's divinest joys!  
Source of our dearest bliss and darkest woe!  
Thy power creates, thy power, alas! destroys  
Dreams that with magic, heaven-caught splendors glow.  
From thy resistless, charmèd influence flow  
Transports that raise the enraptured, ravished mind  
To heights supernal or in depths below  
Imaginable blackness plunge it. Blind  
And helpless as thou art thy fetters conquerors bind.

Thou buildest upon clouds fair palaces,  
Whose halls with bright creations thou dost fill,  
Ethereal habitants of rosy skies,  
Evoked to being at thy potent will.  
Like Memnon's statue moved by cunning skill  
The slumbering soul thy rising beam salutes,  
Awaked by thee to rapture's sweetest thrill;  
The alchemist divine whose touch transmutes  
To gold, thou givest to earth of Heaven the attributes.

Yet would I not invoke thy hallowed power  
Lightly our mean and sordid life to grace.  
Too sacred thou, of earth celestial dower,  
To find in slaves' or tyrants' homes a place;  
Yet, oh, the hope that thou our stubborn race  
Mayest yet regenerate let me not lose;  
That thou into our instincts blind and base  
Of purer light the spirit mayest transfuse,  
And round our mortal state immortal joys diffuse.

## Asphodel

Shine ever, else, celestial Love! a star  
In the far heaven of the Unattained,  
Sending thy beams serenely from afar,  
By mists of earth's chill atmosphere unstained;  
From springs exhaustless thy clear light sustained,  
Life's bark o'er trackless waters safe to guide,  
Until her haven of repose be gained;  
Lest from thy high sphere fallen it betide  
A thing of senseless matter Youth's fond dreams deride.

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A sunny slope by hills encompassed round,  
Whose summits fade into the bending sky,  
With glory of primeval forests crowned,  
That veil in vaporous robes their majesty;  
While of the sea the waters shadowy,  
Glimmer through sudden breaks in glimpses caught  
Far in the hazy distance, silently  
Stirring the hidden depths of slumbering thought  
With fancies vague and sweet, like zephyrs perfume-fraught.

A limpid stream, now hidden among trees,  
Now flashing into light, o'er amber sands,  
That ceaseless babbles of Earth's mysteries,  
Of cloud-borne tidings from far tropic lands,  
Of ships hope-freighted, wrecked on foreign strands,  
Of Youth and Joy, of Sorrow and of Death;  
(But Nature wills that whoso understands  
Of grief the speech, alone interpreteth  
The note discordant heard Earth's sweetest strain beneath.)

A stately dwelling crowns the green ascent,  
Embowered in trees and hung with trailing vines;  
Lifting its turrets to the orient,  
That catch the sun's first golden beam that shines  
Beyond the hills, his last when he declines;  
And where the woods a wilder aspect take  
At sultry noon the shadow of the pines  
A still retreat for charm'd revery make,  
Fresh as the gelid depths of some crystalline lake.

## Asphodel

High over all the deep and liquid blue  
Of heaven serenely smiles, untroubled here  
By baleful mists the soul's aspiring view  
That intercept, seeking her native sphere;  
Soft odorous winds the tepid atmosphere  
Stir gently, rocking cradled buds to dreams  
Of all delights that subtly minister  
To that of being—melody of streams  
Or birds; of sun or star bright dew-reflected beams.

Such was the spot where Eden bloomed again  
For two of mortal mould; fair as ere Death  
Had cast his shadow over Earth, or Sin  
Blighted her fairest bloom with poisoned breath.  
Here Love now crowns them with immortal wreath,  
And Nature offers her divinest draught  
In sacramental pomp; on wings of Faith,  
Dissolved in rapture from Love's chalice quaffed,  
Their souls to realms supernal airs celestial waft.



Here the enchanted hours on noiseless wing—  
Each bearing gifts of fairest bloom to lay  
Before them of the lavish wealth of Spring—  
Breathing sweet odors, glided swift away,  
Till Summer followed in the steps of May,  
Trailing her gorgeous robes upon the ground,  
With flowers of every varied color gay;  
Her laughing brow with blushing roses crowned,  
And scattering as she passed Delights and Joys around.

And Learning brought her treasures to impart  
A subtler charm to those that Nature wore;  
For Julian in the magic realm of Art  
Had wandered far; his mind in the world's lore  
Had steeped; his inner vision, to the core  
Piercing of things, discerned behind the dense  
Dull mask of senseless matter that they bore,  
The soul that gave them being; intense  
And full his life of all life owned the influence.

## Asphodel

At the clear springs his spirit had drunk deep  
Of Wisdom's sacred stream; so was he strong  
To do or suffer that his soul might keep  
Her whiteness undefiled amid the throng  
Of worldlings weak or wicked; he still clung  
To boyhood's bright illusions, and his faith  
Ended to witness the Empire of Wrong  
Still greenly bloomed; the desolating breath  
Of Time no dear hope yet, no joy, had laid in death.

Oft had his soul with noble ardor glowed,  
Dilating to the measure of his trust,  
From off the chains of bondage that corrode  
The souls of men with strength-consuming rust,  
Some link to strike, Evil some deadly thrust  
To give with Truth's bright sword; so should his name  
Live in men's hearts; nor in forgotten dust  
Moulder, in death's divorce, his mortal frame,  
But, hallowed, share the immortality of Fame.

A lofty soul that dwelt in antique mould,  
Where grace and strength were blent in just degree;  
An ardent spirit that might not grow cold  
Or stern, but sat in bright serenity;  
A mind that, self-contained, was clear and free;  
A heart attuned to Nature's varied moods,  
But to the accents of Humanity  
Vibrating longest; amid multitudes  
At home, yet not alone in voiceless solitudes.

Love's charm'd hand had never touched the chords  
Of being, drawing thence their sweetest tone;  
Revealing to his soul in burning words  
The gospel whose glad promises atone  
For all of bitterness the heart hath known,  
Or yet may know, until, effulgent bright,  
Broke on his soul the glory of the dawn  
Before whose splendor paled each lesser light  
Of life's horizon, sunk into Oblivion's night.

## Asphodel

Transfigured by its beams Violet stood,  
A radiant vision of celestial mould;  
The chosen priestess of the Fair and Good,  
Whose advent Youth's bright dreams had oft foretold.  
Imagination, borne on pinion bold  
And strong to heights unseen of mortal eye,  
Beyond the realm of Reason, clear and cold,  
No fairer dream of mortal destiny  
Had pictured than the dear and sweet reality.

Seated beneath the shade of some old oak  
Oft would they watch the blue and silent sky,  
Whose tranquil depths to their young bosoms spoke  
Of love enduring through Infinity.  
Oft would they watch the clouds that floated by,  
And picture there some island where the blest,  
Freed from Earth's trammels, through eternity  
Might dwell; some haven of ecstatic rest  
That Fancy with unfading beauty would invest.

And oft would Violet in the sweet tongue  
Of her own land some antique ballad sing,  
Whose cadences the forest shades among  
Like echoes from another sphere would ring;  
Or tones with soul-taught sweetness ravishing,  
Veiled in the accents of some song-adept,  
From out the depths of her own heart would spring,  
That all unconscious there till now had slept,  
And waking, round them both the chain of silence kept.

And many a bright creation Julian wove  
From his own fancy; many an old romance  
He would recount, or tale of hapless love,  
With voice commoved, or pity-laden glance;  
Whereat, with gently-troubled countenance,  
Would Violet sigh; and thus the flame they fed  
Of love, that sought such mask'd utterance;  
And legends wild and fairy tales they read;  
Stringing bright gems of Fancy on Truth's golden thread.

## Asphodel

And thus they yielded to the subtle power  
That breathed in every gale, exhaled unseen  
From out the perfumed calyx of each flower,  
And every tender shoot of living green;  
Softly it wrapped them in the tremulous sheen  
That over forest, hill and valley lay,  
Transfiguring all it touched—the smile serene  
Of the great Soul that animates the clay  
Of earth, and rules the world with mild, benignant sway.

And as a seed draws from the soft, moist earth  
Its nourishment, and hid beneath the mould,  
Breaks from its shell and silently puts forth  
Its tender shoots until the manifold  
Powers by which its being is controlled  
Impel its growth to seek the vital air,  
Then dews and sunshine its young leaves unfold,  
And on the senses it breaks unaware,  
Of sweetness and of beauty a creation rare—

So did the flower of love its leaves expand,  
Greeting the day with sudden light and bloom;  
Fed by soft dews, by airs celestial fanned,  
It sheds around a ravishing perfume.  
Of torrid heats unconscious that consume,  
Or frosts that blight, it bares its glowing heart  
To the transfiguring splendors that illumine  
Its beauty; all things to its bloom impart  
Their fairest, and become of its own life a part.

O hour supreme! when first the golden chain  
Of speech unites two souls that silently  
Had intertwined their being. Love's sweet pain  
Is changed to rapture when this melody  
Divine gives vague, mute bliss reality.  
Hopes, like young birds that from their downy nest  
To dare their fate, eager yet timid fly,  
Grow bold when in security they rest,  
And fearless plume their wings, to higher flights addressed.

And now Love's lotus-flower steeps their souls  
In sweet oblivion of all life had held,  
Beyond the fairy picture time unrolls  
Before their charmèd gaze—a glimpse revealed  
Of Heaven to mortal vision. Time can yield  
In all his course no fairer, dearer hour;  
In Joy's bright meteor-blaze her beams concealed,  
The star of Hope has lost her useless power,  
Of Sorrow's dreary night her milder light the dower.

The golden circle of Humanity  
Is narrowed to themselves. For them alone  
Was Earth created, joyous, fair and free,  
The realm where each the other would enthrone,  
Sole sovereign whose dear sway all things should own  
In glad obedience—egotism sublime  
Of Youth and Love, whose faith may well atone  
For the cold wisdom with which hoary Time  
Crowns the steep height that Age with faltering step must climb.



### CANTO THIRD

The months revolving now the waning year  
Had decked in fleeting splendors, and the hour  
Was come whose golden sands the perfect sphere  
Of Violet's happiness should round, the dower  
Of Youth, Hope's fragrant, many-tinted flower  
Bringing to full fruition in the ray  
Serene of Love. Of winds and waves the power  
Had wrought, glad tidings safely to convey  
To her expectant soul on this auspicious day.

## Asphodel

Here where, upraised for her the sacred veil  
That hid of life the mysteries divine,  
Earth's grosser fires beside the light grew pale  
That burns with lustre pure before Love's shrine,  
Here where her soul the sacramental wine  
Of Love made strong the bitterness to taste  
Unshrinking of life's cup, her heart within  
Love's magic circle sheltered, now at rest,  
Waits the assurance dear that makes the Future blest.

Sweet meed of sorrows past the happiness  
Time holds in trust—a mother's voice to hear  
Again, again her native accents; the excess  
Of her new joy into a mother's ear  
To pour, her resting-place the breast sincere  
That sheltered infancy;—of this delight,  
Supreme and sacred, with the opening year  
Her bliss that shall complete, her longing sight  
The assurance dear awaits before the approaching night.

Slowly the soft Autumnal twilight falls,  
Breathing a pensive charm; and never yet  
Were met within those gray, time-hallowed walls  
A happier group than now with Violet  
The lagging moments speed; and if regret,  
Of loss and absence born, on life's bright sky  
A tender shadow cast, 't is but that set  
Far in its depths more clearly from on high  
May shine the sacred fires that light our destiny.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lo! at the open door a pallid face  
Like that of one who bears ill tidings, chills  
Each breast with sudden terrors that replace  
The expectant joy, a nameless dread that kills,  
And at its source the stream of life congeals;  
And while the unshaped fear pales every cheek  
That from the future all its brightness steals,  
"What tidings bringest thou, Victor? Speak, oh speak!"  
Violet's faltering accents thus the silence break.

With solemn tenderness her hand in his  
The stranger took; and "Violet!" he cries,  
"From all-wise Heaven our earthly suffering is;  
In Heaven our truest consolation lies,  
And Heaven alone the willing sacrifice  
Content accepts." — "My mother, then, is dead!"  
In accents faint she said; then closed her eyes  
On life's too cruel aspect, as she laid,  
Like some pale, storm-crushed flower, on Julian's breast her head.

"Look up, my Violet! Belov'd, wake!  
Dolores lives in Heaven!" Julian cried.  
And Victor, from his eyes while lightnings break—  
"Dolores lives in Heaven, whence, sanctified,  
This message now she sends; and ill betide  
Him who would dare oppose the last command  
A mother leaves her child. Let this decide  
Between us."—Ormond took with faltering hand  
His letter to the Dead unopened that remained,

And one in which Dolores' hand had traced  
In trembling characters her last farewell,  
Tender and sad, linked with a last behest,  
For Violet of love and happiness the knell—  
“Thy future, dear, to one who loves thee well—  
Who saved thy father's honor, I confide,  
Content,” she said; “so let his care dispel  
Thy grief when I am gone; thy footsteps guide.  
Redeem the pledge I gave; be Victor's happy bride.”

“Alas, poor Violet! Our letters, then,  
Outrun by Heaven's swift message, came too late!”  
Ormond exclaimed; and Anna sighed again  
“Alas, poor Violet!”—As when through the gate  
Of dawn the chill rays that illuminate  
With gray uncertain light some wintry day,  
Struggle, and through the atmosphere vibrate  
Feebly, the life in Violet's heart that lay  
Here quivering through her frame resumed a doubtful sway.

And slowly raising the dark-fringèd lids  
In brief oblivion that had veiled her brain,  
Her eyes she turns around, where fate forbids  
The light of joy to be relumed again,  
Quenched in the darkness of a cureless pain—  
A troubled glance, as when from evil dreams  
The soul awakes and Reason seeks to gain  
Anew her empire; while what is or seems  
Joyless and cold alike the heart foreboding deems.

And as the stern and silent group she saw,  
Frozen within their bosoms at its source  
Grief's gentle rain, a vague and sudden awe  
Mingled with her first pain, with leaden force  
Her sorrow checking in its headlong course;  
Then coldly calm as monumental stone,  
"Why look ye thus? Than Death is aught then worse?  
Yet surely this some kindly drops had drawn  
From pitying eyes," she said, in hard constrained tone.

Then Julian—from whose brow all trace of wrath,  
Swept by the mighty wave of love away,  
Had passed, like footprints on the sandy path  
That borders ocean, with resistless sway  
When the full tide sweeps in—the blinding ray  
Shut from his vision that lit up the abyss  
Of yawning darkness that before him lay,  
And pressing to Violet's brow his lips—"Let this  
Attest a higher bond to Heaven, Love's hallowing kiss.

"And if from thence Dolores' spirit, freed  
From the gross darkness of our mortal state,  
Beholds us now, the doom her love decreed  
Knowledge that beams celestial animate  
Revokes; and if, in their serene estate  
The angels weep, she weeps that men aside  
Should set Truth's higher law, with obstinate  
Dull vision turning from her prospects wide  
And fair, their steps by false and wandering lights to guide."

"Nay," Victor, pale with ire suppressed, replied,  
"This knot no shaft from Fancy's quiver drawn,  
But the sharp sword of Justice shall divide."  
Then, pausing, turned to Violet: "Hope has grown  
Too strong within my breast to yield her throne  
Passive," he said, "to Fate's first cruel shock.  
Oh, at thy heart of days forever gone  
Let the sad ghosts with trembling fingers knock,  
Potent the seal'd fount of Memory to unlock."

Then on her soul first broke the fatal truth  
That flashed, a flaming sword, before the gates  
Of the lost Eden of her blighted youth;  
And as one shipwrecked, while hope animates  
Shrinks from his fate, but calmly death awaits  
When from his grasp the waves have swept away  
His frail support, so, in the ice-bound straits,  
Now, of Despair, bereft of her last stay,  
To their wild waves she yields her heart a passive prey.



And pale and calm, like some fair, fragile flower  
Touched by the first rude frost, she gently said,  
“Alas! by her who brings for her chief dower  
Remorse and cureless grief, is ill repaid  
A husband’s love. Oh, seek not to invade,  
Victor, the sanctuary of my woe;  
Within that sacred, joy-dispelling shade  
Let the dark waters of my being flow,  
Untroubled their brief course by Passion’s mocking glow.

“And thou, Belovēd, grieve not that so soon  
The cherished flower that bloomed upon thy breast  
Has withered, ere the splendors of life’s noon  
Could light, or evening gild its placid rest.  
Our Father, knowing all, knows what is best,  
And loving, wounds us not with needless pain.  
Yet, oh, to enter on that solemn quest  
Alone, without thy strong clasp to sustain—  
Fain would my shrinking soul refuse this cup to drain.”

“Oh yield not, Violet, to grief’s dark spell  
Thy spirit,” Ormond cried, “the passive thrall;  
Nor bid to hope and happiness farewell  
That thou thus early sharest a natural  
And common sorrow. Time, that covers all  
Unsightly ruins that his hand has made  
With budding leaves and blossoms, shall recall  
Hope’s vital sap thy being to pervade,  
And Joy’s bright sun dispel of this dark cloud the shade.”

“And, oh, the affection here that would replace  
Hers that in Heaven shall watch o’er thee still,”  
Said Anna, folding her in fond embrace,  
“Reject not. With a child’s dear cares, oh, fill  
Our childless days till, this dark cloud of ill  
Dispersed, life’s sun shine forth serene and bright.  
Child of our love! our Violet! distil  
Thy sweets and shed around thy heaven-caught light  
In our life’s garden still, source of our best delight.”

## Asphodel

41

“Enough,” said Victor; “it were idle now,  
While Grief’s dark shade on spirit and on mind  
Lies cold, a claim the heart would disallow  
To press. Let Nature, ever wise and kind,  
The icy fetters Violet’s soul that bind  
Loosen with gentle hand, and time restore  
All things with power benignant their defined  
And just proportions; then let Reason soar  
Untrammelled to Truth’s cloudless heights. I ask no more.”

\* \* \* \* \*

And thus the fabric Youth and Love had raised,  
A fair Aladdin’s palace, from whose bright  
And countless windows joy’s clear beams had blazed,  
Silent and swift had vanished in the night.  
And when the cheerful morning’s rosy light  
Dispelled the shadows over earth that lay,  
The spot where late that Palace of Delight  
Had stood, the brightness of her kindling ray  
Disclosed, a scene of desolation, bare and gray.

Not with the seeming death that winter brings  
To Nature's gay activity and bloom—  
The kindly sleep whence life awakening springs  
To fairer colors and more sweet perfume.  
Beyond the gloomy portals of the tomb  
The blighted flower of love may blossom now  
Alone. Its sacred radiance shall illumine  
The garland crowning an immortal brow,  
But mortal springs no more with charms divine endow.

And as a child, whose eager mind essays  
The task too hard for his weak powers in vain,  
At last shuts up the book, and, tired, lays  
Aside the problem that perplexed his brain,  
So Violet, weary, sought not to sustain  
The unequal struggle, but at once aside  
With life's dark problem cast life's joy and pain,  
In the still darkness of the grave to hide  
The ruins of the Dream love's light had glorified.

Gently her gentle spirit sank to rest;  
No vain complaints or unavailing tears  
Disturbed the hours that Youth would fain contest  
With Death; and if at times some natural fears  
Oppressed her soul, for all the golden years  
Unlived, some fond regrets, these shadows soon,  
Touched by the glory from celestial spheres  
That lit the darkness of the dread Unknown,  
Vanished like morning mists before the radiant noon.

One cloud alone hung ever, dark and chill,  
Above the horizon of Earth's fading sky;  
A cloud that there should rest immutable,  
Till from her mortal sight it passed for aye,  
Lost in the darkness of Eternity,  
Or by its awful splendors swift dispelled,—  
The shadow of the silent agony  
That preyed on Julian's soul and thence compelled  
To one dull sense of pain each fibre being held.

From all the natural joys of youth withdrawn,  
As thus he saw her slowly, day by day,  
Fade like a star in some sad wintry dawn,  
Within his breast the feebly flickering ray  
Of Hope's pale torch went out; in dread array  
Before his soul stern images of gloom  
Arose—that form companion of the clay  
Where Grace and Beauty dwelt in breathing bloom;  
In all its horrors clothed the dark and silent tomb.

Wildly he prayed to Heaven some aid to lend,  
Some saving help in this his bitter need;  
Alas! the high designs of Heaven bend  
Not to our low estate; and once decreed,  
Our fates to their appointed end proceed.  
The vision of our dull mortality  
Is all too narrow the wide plans to read  
That guide our being; in blind agony  
The bruised heart can but shrink from pain with helpless cry.

\* \* \* \* \*

The shadows closing round the cheerless day  
Were deepening now, and whirling on the blast,  
The last dead leaves, torn from the boughs away,  
Were borne, the spectres of a vanished Past.  
The sky with gathering darkness overcast  
Hung over Nature's lifeless form, a pall;  
And sad as wailings of lost souls outcast  
From Heaven for aye, the winds released from thrall  
Swept through the solemn pines, her dirge funereal.

How changed the scene! How changed, alas! her heart,  
As Violet took of life her last farewell;  
Each wildwood sound that once had formed a part  
Of Nature's joyous pæan, to the knell  
Turned of dead hopes, and broke the magic spell  
That erst the grassy hillside, daisy-grown,  
Had changed to enchanted meads of asphodel.  
Blighted by frosts no sun-ray could dispel,  
The brief, bright summer of her love was done,  
Ere yet the fleeting bloom that saw its birth was gone.

“Come near, Belovèd; let us once again  
Together watch the sun sink to his rest;  
But not, alas! in promise bright, as when  
Earth smiled upon us in gay beauty drest,”  
She softly said, as faintly from the west  
Through gathering shadows broke a pallid gleam  
And lit her couch. “When the sun’s rays invest  
Nature in day’s returning light, his beam  
Shall waken thee alone from our enchanted Dream.

“Take in thy dear hand mine, that I may feel  
The strong support of love in this last hour;  
So gently o’er my mortal sense shall steal,  
Robbed of its bitterness, the conquering power  
Of death; as to some fragile tropic flower  
Decay comes softly, under tropic skies  
That smile on it. My spirit shall not cower,  
Thus while I gaze in thy belovèd eyes,  
But to the Throne of Love, made strong by love, shall rise.”



O, bitter anguish! helpless thus to see,  
Silent and pitiless, the hand of Fate  
Place on that form its seal that blindly we  
Have held to Love's dear service dedicate;  
To hear that voice for the last time vibrate  
Without whose tones were discord heavenly choirs;  
The last responsive glance of eyes to wait  
That lit our world with joy-enkindling fires;  
To see, and stretch no hand, while our life's life expires.

“Dost thou remember that enchanted eve  
When first we met, Belovēd; when, our hands  
Uniting, Ormond bade thee to receive  
To thy regard a child of sunnier lands,  
Born by the wind of Fate to northern strands,  
And from rude airs to shield her for his sake?  
Alas! the flower that from its native sands  
Transplanted, sudden tempests overtake,  
Uprooted, no warm sun to life can reāwake.

“And yet—though cold annihilation claim  
This fragile vesture of mortality,  
It cannot quench the pure, celestial flame  
That lights the shadows of eternity.  
Yes! that within me which can never die  
I feel; and deep enshrined in my soul  
Our love, earth's fairest gift, I bear on high;  
Could I more richly freighted reach life's goal,  
Though still some few brief years of earth should o'er me roll?

“And thou, dear friend, those few brief years shalt pass  
Not all unhappy, though thy Violet  
Speak to thy heart but through the tangled grass  
Above her grave with dews of heaven wet;  
For in thy soul shall live, an amulet  
To keep it strong, the memory of our love;  
Until to hope transformed, in heaven set,  
A star serene, it draw thy gaze above,  
And thy upsoaring soul her destiny approve.

“Yes, soaring up from Grief’s consuming fire,  
True to herself thy soul shall plume her wings,  
And to the clear, untroubled heights aspire  
Where living waters flow from deathless springs.  
And oh! when Heaven wide her portal flings  
To greet thee, victor in the appointed strife,  
How poor shall seem unwilling offerings,  
Laid on the altar of Eternal Life,  
Of Earth’s frail flowers fed by sunshine pale and brief.

“Now closer round me draws the gathering gloom;  
Farewell, O Earth! where still the dearest part  
I leave of my divided life. Illume,  
O Sun Serene! the dark waves that dispart  
Our being, with thy beams, that my faint heart,  
Touched by their glory, on her homeward way  
Courageous may set out. Behold! athwart  
The darkness breaks the first resplendent ray  
Of light celestial, herald of Eternal Day!”

And thus her spirit passed from earth's cold sphere,  
Of too ethereal mould to linger long,  
Chilled by the mists of our bleak atmosphere,  
The strife and sorrows of our world among.  
Like the last strains of some sweet, pensive song  
It passed away; and in the hearts where fell  
Its dying sweetness, Memory shall prolong,  
Until celestial harmonies dispel  
All sadness, the sad echoes of her last farewell.

## CANTO FOURTH

Again to earth descending from the skies,  
Bringing sweet airs to weary mortals, Spring,  
Ethereal goddess, bade the force that lies,  
Waiting her coming, in each living thing,  
To wake refreshed from torpid slumbering,  
And every fibre stir with subtle power;  
That to each cell the elements might bring  
Its tribute each, at the auspicious hour  
Unseen to mould, combining, leaf and fruit and flower.

## Asphodel

And swiftly wrought her busy ministers  
Earth to adorn for her brief holiday;  
But chief her fairest daughter, Hope, transfers  
A grace divine to our inert, dull clay;  
For where of her clear eyes the enkindling ray  
Resplendent falls a more than mortal bloom  
Each opening bud and tender leaf display;  
And flowers still sleeping in the seed perfume  
Mild days that coming suns with warmer light illumine.

In this sweet season of awakening life,  
A tired wanderer, Julian stood again  
Upon his natal soil. The inward strife  
Whose wasting fires at healing springs in vain  
He had sought to quench, still held relentless reign  
Within his bosom, odorless and sere  
Making life's bloom; still wan and hollow-eyed Pain  
Walked by his side, the silent minister  
Of each returning day for many a weary year.

Again he looked upon the tranquil scene  
Where first his soul beneath the glowing rays  
Of love had blossomed. Now as then serene  
And softly bright to his life-weary gaze  
Nature her fresh unsullied charms displays,  
And perfumed airs breathe round his languid brow;  
Alas! no sun can brighten heavy days  
Darkened by grief; and Heaven shall endow  
With her best gifts in vain the lightning-scathèd bough.

Not his the grief that seeks in outward things  
Some brief forgetfulness of pain, or finds  
In transient joys some respite. Time that brings  
Balm to the bruised heart, and gently binds  
Its bleeding wounds, while round the soul he winds  
The mantle of oblivion, to him  
Such solace brings alone as still reminds  
His spirit of her loss, and from the dim  
Long vista of the Past casts a reflected gleam.

## Asphodel

In vain through many a land to which his soul  
In Youth's fond dreams with ardent longing turned,  
Restless he wandered. Vainly to the goal  
Where Fame's bright star with living lustre burned  
His course he kept; his heart alas! had learned  
The lore that turns life's magic-tinted sky  
To hueless space; and in his heart inurned  
The ashes of Love's blighted flower lie,  
His sole remaining wealth of Youth's rich argosy.

And as the bright, joy-giving sunlight falls  
In darkened splendor through the antique panes  
That light some dim cathedral, whose gray walls  
With grave and sombre imagery it stains,  
So to his soul the light life still retains,  
Passing through darkened windows, takes a cold  
And solemn hue that over all things reigns,  
And coloring life's aspects manifold,  
Hope's sun-loved flower forbids its petals to unfold.



Yet from life's bitter conflict he had come,  
Though faint and wounded, victor at the last;  
Nor unrewarded, though of earthly bloom  
Fate on his languid brow no wreath has placed.  
As one who sees before him lie a waste  
Of desert sands, beyond whose arid bound  
Green trees uprise with branches interlaced  
That make refreshing shade upon the ground,  
So did his soul discern afar heights verdure-crowned.

Celestial heights, 'mid whose unfading bloom,  
Life's narrow desert crossed, at last his soul,  
Approved, her glorious birthright shall assume,  
The crown and guerdon of life's well-won goal;  
And through his being distant echoes roll  
Of harmonies divine, that upward draw  
His spirit from the withering control  
Of earth's corroding cares, that restless gnaw  
The heart that shrinks in vain from Heaven's unchanging law.

No weak indulgence of a selfish grief  
Had loosed his soul from Nature's deathless bond;  
Still as in Youth's fresh season, bright and brief,  
A chord vibrated there that could respond  
To hopes that lay his narrowed sphere beyond;  
Though lopped the fairest branch from life's green tree,  
And with it blighted in the bud each fond  
And joyous hope, through boughs the sap flowed free  
That drew their bloom from roots cast in Humanity.

And still, a living Presence, though unseen,  
Real as when to animated clay  
She lent the lustre of a light serene,  
Beside him Violet walked on his lone way—  
A fadeless beam from Heaven's eternal day  
That pierced the darkness of Earth's starless night,  
The black abyss illumining where lay  
In wait Despair, with clear and constant light—  
Pledge and assurance dear of being infinite.

\* \* \* \* \*

Below the horizon sunk the sun now sent  
His parting beams that, fairer, he unseen,  
And softer than his noonday radiance, lent  
A glow of transient glory to the scene.  
So, when Love's sun has set, his beams serene  
Ofttimes, before they fade, illumine life's sky  
With radiance fairer than the light had been  
That poured at noon its splendors from on high,  
Till night and darkness close round hues that mock the eye.

And one by one in Heaven's spacious court  
Each its appointed place the silent stars  
Taking, assembled, glittering cohort  
That with the Regent Moon her glory shares.  
All nature now a tranquil aspect wears,  
That woos the weary heart awhile to rest;  
And over Violet's grave blow tepid airs,  
Sweet with the breath of blossoms that invest  
With bloom this spot where Peace now dwells, a friendly guest.

Here Julian watched the gathering shadows close  
Round Earth, for him to be dispelled no more;  
At last his troubled soul shall find repose,  
And Death, that took, his treasure shall restore.  
Soon shall his bark from Life's receding shore  
To realms of endless day her swift course bend;  
So on the ear of Night his heart shall pour  
Her last lament, whose echoes shall transcend  
Our mortal sphere and to the steadfast stars ascend:

“O sacred fire of Youth! whose light divine  
O'er life's horizon cast a living glow,  
Wherein, transfigured, common things did shine,  
And tears in falling changed to Hope's bright bow;  
While clouds with presage black of coming woe,  
Touched by the splendor of thy magic beams,  
Seemed but the gorgeous drapery spread below  
The Future, pictured in our ardent dreams,  
Quenched in the night of years one star thy loss redeems.

“For in my barren life all else is dark  
Save one bright memory of vanished years;  
This sole possession Youth’s rich-freighted bark  
Has saved amid the wreck of hopes, and fears  
Dearer than hopes, as Night’s cool silent tears  
To drooping buds are dearer than the heat  
Of noon; and now this memory my spirit cheers  
With such companionship as well might cheat  
The heart of grief; so, still, may vanished joys be sweet.

“And in the silence of the solemn night  
The echoes of a voice forever stilled  
Thrill my worn bosom with a wild delight—  
The vague expectance of hopes unfulfilled;  
And once again my empty life is filled  
With smiling images of promised joys,  
Till by the dawn’s pale light untimely chilled  
In space they vanish, and the world’s rude noise  
My brief, illusive happiness again destroys.

## Asphodel

“Yet would I fain evoke from out the Past  
Once more the shadows of Youth’s vanished hours.  
Retrace, O Time! thy steps and let me cast  
A nearer glance on Love’s forsaken bowers;  
Restore me, oh! restore life’s springtime flowers;  
Though their young bloom be withered yet warm rain,  
From quenchless sources fed, in quickening showers  
Shall fall on them till they revive again,  
And with their living fragrance soothe life’s cureless pain.

“Mysterious stars! that from heaven’s azure dome  
Seem to watch over us, like angel eyes—  
The beacon-lights of our eternal home—  
If ye the secrets of the silent skies  
Do hold that mock our vain philosophies,  
Reveal, reveal unto my listening soul  
The living word wherein all wisdom lies;  
Oh! free my spirit from the base control  
Of earth-born mists that hide from it its aim and goal.

“Do I not know that she I mourn as dead  
Lives in immortal youth, forever blest?  
Forever healed the wounds that here had bled,  
The strife and fever of her soul at rest?  
Oh! wherefore then this unavailing quest  
After some nearer knowledge of her state;  
Though now my heart, like a forsaken nest,  
Sees Spring’s return, yet still is desolate,  
A Spring unfading blooms beyond the Eternal Gate.

“My Violet! ’t was in the springtime first,  
The time of budding hopes and balmy airs,  
That thy effulgent beauty on me burst,  
Dimmed by no shadow of approaching cares;  
Alas! the smiling aspect Fortune wears  
Too oft is like the calm of tropic seas  
That lulls the bark their storm-fraught bosom bears  
To false security, till darkening skies  
Announce its doom; so Fate wrecked our young destinies.

## Asphodel

“But ’mid the wreck and ruin of our lives,  
Still fresh and fragrant as when life was young,  
The sacred treasure of our love survives,  
Immortal as the soul from which it sprung;  
Here Fortune powerless her shafts hath flung;  
As when the Sun majestic moves on high,  
Tempests arise, the sky with clouds are hung  
That veil his light, serene he journeys by,  
His home remote from storms that trouble mortal eye.

“So thus serene the image of our love  
Now beckons me from earthly griefs away;  
My soul exultant feels her pinions move,  
Eager to break from her frail shell of clay.  
Now, now at length dawns the Eternal Day;  
Smiling around me hover phantoms bright.—  
I come! I come! Ye point to me the way  
Where waits my Violet; on waves of light  
Upborne I float dissolved in exquisite delight.”



Thus on the night expired in accents faint  
His voice, to fall no more on mortal ear;  
No more of love the unavailing plaint,  
Of Joy or Grief the speech to utter here;  
And o'er the grave shall many a pitying tear  
Of lovers fall where take their peaceful rest  
Julian and Violet; while each new year  
With fragrant honors shall the spot invest  
Sacred henceforth to Love, Life's deathless bond confest.









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